EU 2A

Critique of NATO Parliamentary Assembly Committee Report Entitled:

5 Years into the War on Terror – Impact and Implications for the Transatlantic Alliance

Rapporteur: Ruprecht POLENZ (Germany)

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Prepared by the Department of State

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Summary:

This report assesses the nature of the terrorist threat facing NATO Allies, the contours of counterterrorism cooperation within NATO and other international organizations, and developments in Iraq and the broader Middle East. The report states that the results of the War on Terror have been "mixed" – terrorist networks have become much more diffuse and difficult to detect and disrupt, exploiting cyberspace and grievances in the Middle East to radicalize and recruit home-grown extremists in order to execute terrorist attacks. According to the report, NATO's counterterrorism (CT) role is important but limited to date. The report recommends that NATO develop a more concerted homeland defence approach, through the coordination of transatlantic national policies, and calls for increased NATO-EU cooperation and coordination on combating terrorism and focus on public diplomacy.

General Comments:

The report provides a concise and coherent summary of NATO's CT efforts since 9/11. However, the report is controversial in its significant criticism of U.S. foreign policy in Iraq and the Broader Middle East (particularly in the decision to invade Iraq). While the report recognizes a link between political oppression and the rise of terrorist movements, it notes that "we cannot and must not impose our political system on others."

On the other hand, the author highlights the importance of democracy and respect for human right and advocates using "soft power" (i.e., values and ideas) to promote political participation, rule of law and economic development, which is largely consistent with U.S. foreign and assistance policy goals. The author also recommends that NATO lend its political clout to help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to address the problem of growing Islamist terrorism.

Areas of U.S. Concern:

The author states that "the U.S. focus on the Iraq war jeopardized the military victory in Afghanistan and fueled the growth of Islamist extremism (para 22)" and has resulted in rising anti-American sentiment among Muslims worldwide. The report is also highly critical of the Administration's human rights record, citing problems with unlawful enemy combatant detainees in Guantanamo and concerns regarding rendition-flights and "secret prisons", which have damaged European public opinion (paras 40-42). The report is largely written from a Euro-centric viewpoint. For instance, para 53 implies that the EU has the principle CT foreign policy role, but

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fails to recognize that several non-EU member Allies (the U.S., Canada, Norway, Iceland and Turkey), will continue to look at the NATO Alliance as a principle diplomatic and multilateral instrument to fight terrorism.

State Department Views:

- The importance of NATO in the GWOT is understated in this paper. NATO provides an essential foreign policy platform to address CT issues across a broad spectrum of political-military issues, including civil emergency preparedness and resilience to terrorist attacks. NATO exercises unite Allies and Partners in contingency response mechanisms and build capabilities to address the report's principal state threat: attacks involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons.

- An additional NATO focus on homeland defense and public diplomacy is promising, but hinges on the actual substance behind these ideas which were not addressed in the report. Welcome further work and deliberations on this important topic.

- We need to urge caution when considering adding NATO's political and diplomatic weight to finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.